



PRRC

emerging trends

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Religion Still Considered Relevant Despite Loss of Impact in U.S.

Religion may seem to be losing its influence on America, but that is not because the public views it as unable to cope with modern life.

Only about one American in three (34 percent) now believes that religion is increasing its influence on American life. A majority of 57 percent see its impact upon our society as decreasing, while 9 percent are undecided about religion's current influence.

INFLUENCE ON AMERICA

	Total
Influence of religion is:	
Increasing	34%
Decreasing	57
No Opinion	9
	100

As recently as in 1986, about half of the public (49 percent) believed religion's influence was increasing in America. Religion's sway in America was most evident in 1957, when seven people in 10 (69 percent) at that time felt its influence was increasing. The perception of religion's influence on America reached its lowest ebb during the turbulent 1960s and 70s era when only 14 percent believed it was increasing, compared to 75 percent who thought it was decreasing.

Although many people may feel religion is losing its impact, this should not be interpreted as meaning they

ANSWER TODAY'S PROBLEMS?

	Total
Religion can answer all or most of today's problems	59%
Religion is old fashioned and out of date	22
No Opinion	19
	100

also think it has lost its relevance. A majority (59 percent) of Americans sustain the belief that religion can answer most problems.

Only 22 percent deny the contemporary relevance of religion while 19 percent are undecided about its current status.

In 1957, eight Americans in 10 (81 percent) expressed confidence that religion has the answer to contemporary problems. That very high level of confidence has never been matched in the intervening years, but a majority of Americans have sustained their faith in the ability of religion to answer problems ever since.

Currently most confident in the ability of religion to deal with contemporary issues are blacks (79 percent), Southerners (73 percent), and women (65 percent). Protestants show more confidence than Catholics in religion in this regard, by a margin of 67 percent to 55 percent.

Republicans (65 percent) show slightly greater confidence than Democrats (59 percent) in religion's answers to modern issues. Party identifications aside, political conservatives in general (70 percent) have greater confidence than moderates (50 percent) or liberals (49 percent) in this regard.

Little if any difference is found among people of varying demographic, geographic, religious, or even political backgrounds, concerning their opinion of the impact of religion upon American life. Indeed, about the only group showing a statistically significant above-average belief that religion's impact is increasing are conservative Democrats (43 percent).

The findings are based on telephone interviews with a representative nationwide sample of 1,012 adults, ages 18 and older conducted during the last week of May 1991.

Majority Believe Personal Faith in Jesus Christ Is the Only Way to Assure Eternal Life

Survey questions can become powerful diagnostic tools, and we are always experimenting with new approaches to measure religious attitudes, beliefs and behavior. The following question, asked for the first time in November 1991, appears to have great potential as a means of measuring Christian belief.

Please tell me whether you agree completely, agree somewhat, disagree somewhat, or disagree completely with this statement: The only assurance of eternal life is personal faith in Jesus Christ.

In response to this question, the great majority of Americans say their personal faith in Jesus Christ is the only assurance of eternal life. Six adults in 10 (59 percent) completely agree that this is true, and 17 percent agree somewhat. Disagreeing are 21 percent, and 3 percent are undecided.

This may become a key diagnostic question for defining the dimensions of religious belief, because it provides a sharp profile of the Christian faithful in this country. Black Americans, for example, are far more likely than whites to express complete faith in Jesus Christ by a margin of 77 percent to 58 percent.

The geographic map of faithful shows the highest concentration of believers in the South (75 percent) and Midwest (61 percent). They are less numerous in the East (49 percent) and West (45 percent).

Women (65 percent) are more likely than men (52 percent) to see Jesus Christ as the only assurance of eternal life. As levels of income and educational attainment grow among the populace, faith declines.

Protestants are more likely than Catholics to proclaim their complete faith, by a margin of 69 percent to 54 percent.

Nine Protestants in 10 (90 percent) who say they have had a "born-again" experience or view themselves as

evangelicals, are in complete agreement that eternal life is attainable only through faith in Jesus Christ.

The sample size permitted us to measure this dimension of faith only according to members of the largest denominations, but this first examination shows some interesting differences. Among the major Protestant denominations 85 percent of Baptists, 67 percent of Lutherans, and 61 percent of Methodists say they completely accept the view that their personal faith is the only assurance of eternal life.

Church members (69 percent) are nearly twice as likely as non-members (37 percent) to see Jesus Christ as their eternal salvation.

Similarly, 74 percent of those who attended church during the week preceding the time of interview are in complete agreement that Christ is the sole means of achieving eternal life, compared to just 48 percent of those who did not attend worship services.

The results are based on telephone interviews with a randomly selected national sample of 1,005 adults, 18 years and older, conducted November 21-24, 1991. For results based on samples of this size, one can say with 95 percent confidence that the error attributable to sampling and other random effects could be plus or minus 3 percentage points.

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF THOSE WHO ACCEPT JESUS CHRIST

	Agree completely	Agree somewhat	Disagree somewhat	Disagree completely
NATIONAL	59%	17%	11%	10%
Male	52	19	13	11
Female	65	16	8	8
18-29 years old	51	22	14	11
30 to 49	58	19	11	11
50 & older	65	12	8	8
East	49	20	14	12
Midwest	61	21	7	6
South	75	11	6	6
West	45	18	17	16
White	58	16	12	10
Non-white	67	23	2	4
Black	77	18	1	*
College graduate	43	20	14	19
Attended college	48	23	16	11
High school graduate	65	16	9	8
Non-High school grad	76	11	6	2

* Less than one-half of one percent.

People Attend Church More Regularly as They Grow Older

People are inclined to attend church more regularly as they grow older, according to a compilation of five years' of studies by the National Opinion Research Center during the period of 1986 to 1991.

According to the surveys, about one adult in three under age 30 (35 percent) claims to attend religious services regularly or every week.

The regularity of attendance increases as people grow older until, by age 70, six adults in 10 (60 percent) say they go to religious services weekly. By age 80, however, as the infirmities of old age make travel more difficult, frequent attendance drops sharply to the point where only 49 percent are still attending services regularly or on a weekly basis.

The surveys were conducted in February to April of each year and

because this is the Lenten-Easter-Passover-Ramadan period, may be higher than average than if they had been taken at another period when religious service attendance usually is not as high or as frequent.

This five-year compilation of the results is taken from an article on "The Ages of Conservatism," published in the November-December 1991 issue of *The American Enterprise*. The findings are captioned with the statement that "on various social issues, the oldest Americans are decidedly the most conservative." This would seem to imply that today's unchurched liberals are tomorrow's conservative church attenders. In our view that interpretation would be somewhat misleading, because attendance rises among political moderates and liberals as well as they grow older.

For that matter, more Americans classify their political ideology as "moderate" rather than as conservative or liberal, so that the preponderance of church attenders or the unchurched of any age are neither liberal nor conservative.

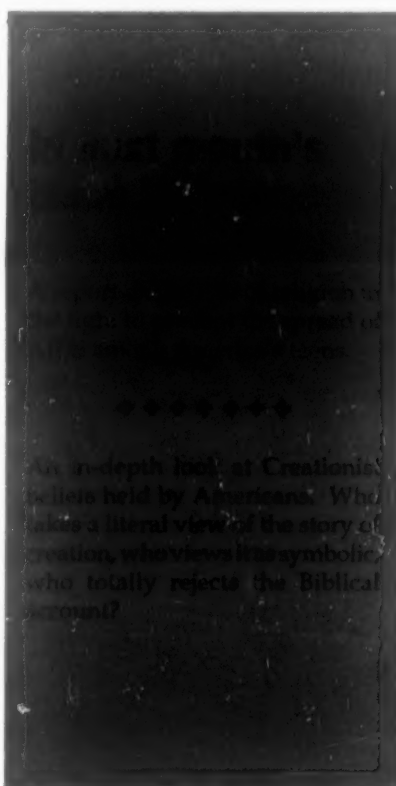
CHURCH ATTENDANCE

Age	
18-29 years	35%
30-44	40
45-59	48
60-69	54
70-79	60
80 and older	49

RELIGIOUS PROFILE OF THOSE WHO ACCEPT JESUS CHRIST

	Agree completely	Agree somewhat	Disagree somewhat	Disagree completely
Protestants	69%	15%	8%	6%
Evangelical	90	7	1	1
Southern Baptist	85	9	1	1
Other Baptist	85	8	3	4
Lutheran	67	15	8	6
Methodist	61	21	6	6
Catholics	54	25	12	6
Church Members	69	15	7	6
Non-members	37	22	18	19
Attended church last week	74	13	6	6
Did not attend	48	20	13	13

"No opinion" (3 percent, nationally) is not shown.



Why Did Born-Again Christians Vote for David Duke?

David Duke, the former Grand Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan and neo-Nazi, recently proclaimed himself to be a born-again Christian, raising the question of the nature of his support from the group that gives their religious preference as Christian.

Duke received many votes from a majority of Louisiana's Christian white voters in his recent bid to become governor.

Six white Protestants in 10 (62%) and five Catholics in 10 (52%) said in a statewide exit poll that they had voted for David Duke.

One Louisiana voter in eight is a white Christian fundamentalist, and David Duke got 69% of their votes. Among white weekly church attenders, he received 57% of the vote.

Not surprisingly, he received very few votes from the state's substantial black population, who are largely credited for his defeat at the polls.

Some political commentators have drawn an erroneous conclusion from these findings that there is a linkage between Christian fundamentalist or evangelical belief and support of ultra-right wing candidates of Duke's ilk.

A more probable explanation of the Duke vote is that he attracted people who are poorly educated and

economically distressed. People in these categories, as seen in the preceding analyses in this issue of **EMERGING TRENDS** on pages 2 and 3 also tend to be politically conservative and to hold conservative religious beliefs. Many of Louisiana's black voters also fit this description, but by an overwhelming margin they rejected Duke. The difference of course is a matter of race.

The findings are based on interviews with 1,675 voters from 30 randomly selected statewide precincts taken as they left the polls. The survey was conducted by Voter Research and Surveys, a consortium that conducts exit polls for ABC, CBS, CNN, and NBC.

DUKE FOR PRESIDENT?

Only 6% of Americans who are familiar with David Duke, recent unsuccessful candidate for the governorship of Louisiana, say he is the kind of man they could support for President.

The following question was asked in a Nov. 7-10 Gallup Poll of the 65% in the sample who said they had heard of Duke:

"Is David Duke the kind of man you could see yourself voting for if he were to run for President?"

The results (based on the 65% aware group):

Yes	6%
No	86
No opinion	8
	100%

WHO VOTED FOR DAVID DUKE?

Total voters	39%
White Protestants	62
White Catholics	52
Black Protestants	3
Black Catholics	9
White born-again Christians/fundamentalists	69
White weekly church goers	57

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The Role of the Bible in American Society by George Gallup, Jr. and Robert Bezilla provides a comprehensive overview of attitudes towards the Bible and trends on Bible reading and knowledge of the Scriptures. Cost per copy is \$9.95.

Religion in America 1992 - Annual report on the key measures on religious attitudes, beliefs, and practices, and predictions for the 1990s. Cost per copy is \$30.

The Unchurched American - 10 Years Later - An important update on the factors that cause people to leave the church, and those that cause them to return. Cost per copy is \$29.

100 Questions and Answers by George Gallup, Jr. and Sarah Jones. A single-volume compendium of the 100 most important questions we have surveyed in the area of religion. A handy reference tool in book size format that categorizes and analyzes key survey data. Price per copy is \$30.



If you would like to place an order, please include \$2.00 for postage and handling. If you would like to receive more information about these publications, contact the Princeton Religion Research Center, 47 Hulfish Street, P.O. Box 389, Princeton NJ 08542. Telephone (609) 921-8112.

Secular Themes Edge Out Religious in the Annual "Christmas Stamp Poll"

Christmas stamps have become a big business for the U.S. Postal Service. As everyone knows, the Christmas season is the busiest time of year for the nation's mail carriers as greeting cards, yuletide gifts, and a seemingly endless stream of Christmas catalogs clog our mailboxes. The stamps that pay postage for the missives have inadvertently become a source for a nationwide poll of the American public's preference for secular or religious themes for Christmas.

The first U.S. Christmas stamps were issued in 1962, but their inspiration can be traced back to the early part of this century when Christmas seals made their first appearance. The first seals came from Denmark in 1904, and were first used in this country in 1907. From a modest beginning of \$4,000 for the benefit of the American Red Cross in Christmas seal sales in 1907, they now raise tens of millions of dollars annually for the American Lung Association.

Christmas seals have always depicted symbols and scenes of the secular celebration of the holiday, usually featuring Santa Claus, Christmas trees, holly wreaths, carolers, or snowmen.

When the U.S. Postal Service issued its first Christmas stamp in 1962, it followed this example by depicting a Christmas wreath and candles. It continued this practice until 1966, when it yielded to calls from critics to present a more religious theme on its stamps. That year the stamp reproduced a portrait of Madonna and child by Hans Memling. This in turn prompted protests by some that the use of religious themes violated the principle of the separation of church and state. The Postal Service then went back and forth between religious and secular themes until 1970 when someone got the idea of offering postal customers their choice of theme.

That practice has prevailed ever since, and the statistics of stamp sales, as maintained by the Postal Service,

provide an annual survey of the public's choice.

The statistics on Christmas stamp sales are staggering. An average of nearly 2 billion Christmas stamps are sold each year. Between 1962 and 1990, over 46 billion Christmas stamps have been sold, yielding revenues of over \$6.3 billion.

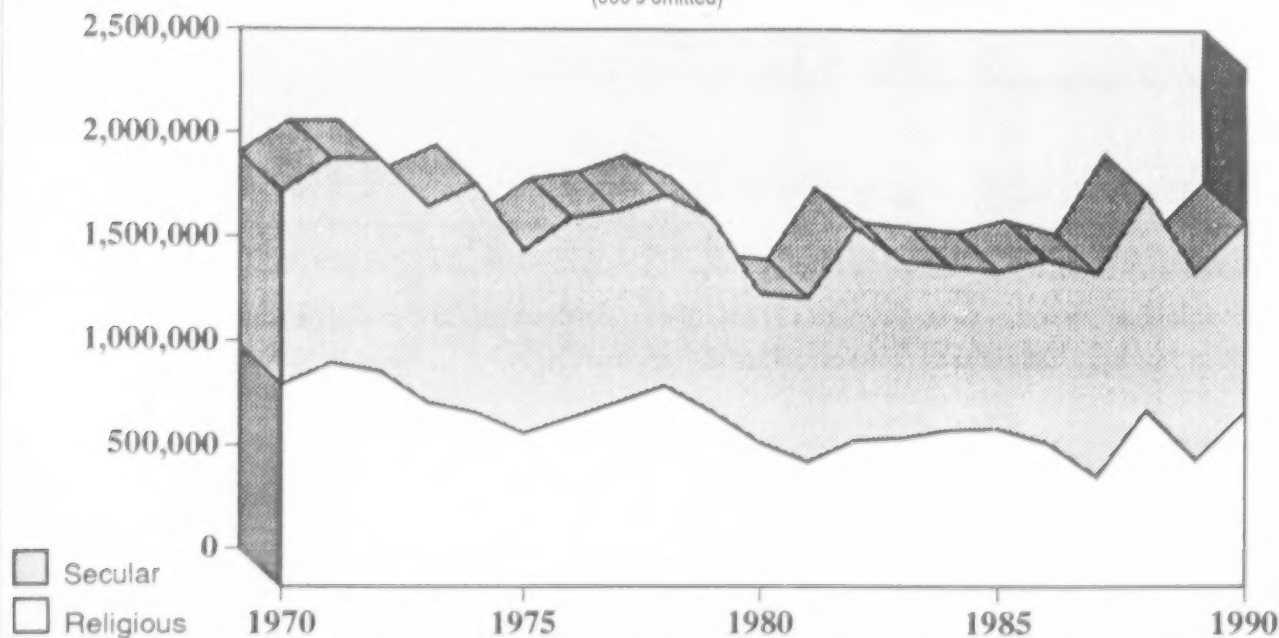
Purchases of secular and religious theme Christmas stamps have been fairly evenly divided since the time both types were offered to the public.

Religious themes were most popular from 1970 to 1972, but ever since, with the exceptions of 1978 and 1985, stamps featuring secular motifs have edged out religious themes.

Overall, since 1970, 53 percent of the public has purchased stamps with secular themes, compared to 47 percent who have used those with religious themes.

CHRISTMAS STAMP SALES

(000's omitted)



It's More Than Just the Book of the Month

A study earlier this year among 2,032 members of the Book-of-the-Month Club found that the Bible was most frequently named as the book that has made the biggest difference in their lives. While many books were named by respondents, the Bible with 21 percent of the votes ranked first.

Ayn Rand's "Atlas Shrugged" was a distant second to the Bible in the voting. Next in order of mention were M. Scott Peck's "The Road Less Traveled," Harper Lee's "To Kill a Mockingbird," and J.R.R. Tolkien's mythological tale, "The Lord of the Rings."

The Book of Mormon (1%) was in a sixth place tie with Margaret Mitchell's "Gone With the Wind" and Dale Carnegie's "How to Win Friends and Influence People."

The study was conducted among 5,000 randomly chosen members of the Book-of-the-Month Club and was sponsored by the Club and the Center for the Book at the Library of Congress. Completed questionnaires were received from 2,032 respondents (a 40-percent response rate, which is about average for surveys of this type). Of these, 778 cited one or more books that had influenced their lives.

BOOKS WITH BIGGEST IMPACT ON PEOPLE'S LIVES

1. The Bible
2. Atlas Shrugged
3. The Road Less Traveled
4. To Kill a Mockingbird
5. The Lord of the Rings
6. The Book of Mormon
7. Gone With the Wind
8. How to Win Friends and Influence People
9. The Feminine Mystique, A Gift From the Sea, Man's Search for Meaning, Passages, When Bad Things Happen to Good People

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